

Early Compositions of The Rolling Stones. Still Rhythm and Blues Covers or Individual Works? Analyses of Selected Titles of Their First LP.

It is a well known fact that early British Bands had a lot of R & B and Rock 'n' Roll songs in their repertoire, even their first Albums reflect what they were playing on stage;¹ own titles were rare those days. Stones, Beatles, Animals, all depended on the same roots and covered material that they and the audience already knew. Some started earlier, some later, to mix their song list with own compositions. As the Beatles had released eight own titles on their first album (out of 14), the Rolling Stones ventured to start with three songs of the 12 of the first LP from 1964. More accurately, there are only two songs and a half song out of the Stones' writing: One is clearly credited to Jagger/Richards (Tell me), one to Phelge, (Now I've got a witness), and the third to Phelge/Spector (Little by little).

Nanker/Phelge was the pseudonym Jagger and Richards used for early compositions, though it is unclear who is meant by whom. In some cases, they used one of these pseudonyms only, as in this case. „Little by little“ mentions Phil Spector as co-author, but his compositional contribution remains unknown. The album sleeve only says Spector plays Maracas on this title.

Following the running order of the album, the first own song is „Now I've got a witness (Like Uncle Gene And Uncle Phil)“, and there surely is a striking correspondence with the title of another song on the same album, „Can I get a Witness“ by E. & B. Holland; L. Dozier. This correspondence, as closer listening will show, goes far beyond the sheer similarity of the title alone.

As Hector puts it, the band wanted to have some instrumental fun with the riff of the original „Can I get a witness“ after recording it.² Thus, „Now I've got a witness (Like Uncle Gene And Uncle Phil)“ had more or less become an instrumental cover version of „Can I get a witness“ and has therefore to be regarded as a musical gag. Because of this, this song might be subtracted from the two and a half own titles, as it is not an own idea. But as the Stones changed some important elements, the song becomes a typical song of the band.

Firstly, to understand the changes made to the original, this original „Can I get a witness“ has to be observed more closely.

„Can I get a witness“, already a cover version of Marvin Gaye's R & B standard hit-number,³ follows the traditional blues scheme, but, because of the high presto tempo of 192 beats, the bars are doubled, so that the scheme results in 24 bars for one chorus. Thus, the form of the song is as follows:

Intro D Major 8 bars

6 chorusses:

1: D D D D G G D D A G D D (each chord stands for two bars)
2: -/- A (Voc break on last bar)
3: -/- D D
Insertion of one bar (A major)
4: -/-
5: -/-
6: fade out

This blues pattern is repeated six times, with a vocal break on A major in the second chorus and a one-bar-insertion between chorus three and four. The last chorus is not completed as it is used for a fade out.

Apart from the intro, there are vocals throughout and no solos. Instruments included are drums, bass (hardly audible), acoustic guitar and piano. On the vocal side there are also backing voices.

Now what did the Stones do to that song? The result is called „Now I’ve got a witness (Like Uncle Gene And Uncle Phil)“. The „uncles“ here are the guest musicians Gene Pitney and Phil Spector, who played on „Little by little“.

At first, the Stones changed the key from D major to the more stones-like E major, maybe because Richards felt more at home in this key to improvise his lead guitar. They also changed from piano to organ, here played by guest musician Ian Stewart. They kept the fast tempo of approx. 192 beats, and so relying on the doubled blues scheme with 24 bars for each chorus. The band did not only omit the first eight bars instrumental intro of the original, they cancelled also the inserted bar between chorus 3 and 4, so the form consists of the repeated chorusses only. Moreover, they decided that five chorusses were enough (it is comparatively short with only 2:29 playing time, whereas „Can I get a witness“ lasts 2:55). In the second chorus the original form was taken over, so the band changed to the dominant chord (here: B) again on the second beat of the next to the last bar. With E major as tonic, the chord progression is:

E E E E A A E E B A E E (each chord stands for two bars)
 -/- B (second chorus only)

And so the song shows this form with five chorusses:

- 1: Harmonica solo
- 2: Harmonica solo & solo organ; bass plays a quick riff in high position

3: nearly as 1, harmonica goes on improvising

4: lead guitar chorus, harmonica pausing

5: as 1 and 3, with fade out

The instruments are: Drums, Bass 1, Bass 2, Lead Guitar, Organ, Harmonica, Percussion (Tambourine).

Being now instrumental, the version offers much field for improvising: guitar, organ and harmonica play solos, even the bass winds up to unusual virtuosity.

As a counterpart to „Can I get a witness“, where Jagger had to sing all the time, he came forward here with playing harmonica throughout, only pausing during the chorus of the lead guitar.

The harmonic structure is built around the chord extension played on the organ (E major with no third, starting from the fifth to major sixth and minor seventh back to major sixth). This motif continues with variations throughout the song, changing to subdominant (A major) and dominant (B major). The song starts with an up-beat from the organ; the figure illustrates the beginning of the song and the organ-part (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Now I've got a witness: Organ-motif



In the second chorus, the organ changes to a solo (in combination with the unstoppable harmonica); the organ solo contains not much more than chord material and arpeggios of the E major, A major and B major chords.

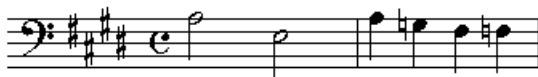
While the drums consist mainly on a bass drum on 1 and 3 and a snare on 2 and 4 and a tambourine as additional percussive element stresses the beats on 2 and 4 as well; the bass part is much more interesting: Throughout the song there can be heard a second bass; this must be a Fender VI Bass⁴ or second bass guitar as these deep sounds cannot be played on a usual guitar. It is played with a pick and therefore good to hear due to its loud attack tone. It is called second bass here because it plays a rather simple line. The ever-repeated motif of this bass is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Now I've got a witness: Motif of Second Bass Guitar



Interestingly, this bass uses the chromatic line of the tonica chord E major also for the subdominant A major (g, f sharp, f), see figure 3.

Figure 3: Now I've got a witness: A major motif of the second bass



During the transition from B major to A major in bars 17 – 20 this bass simply emphasizes the tonic notes with the fifth below and makes use again of the chromatic line to go back to its usual pattern, see figure 4.

Figure 4: Now I've got a witness: Second Bass from B major to A major



Meanwhile, the first bass offers more elements of virtuosity. Firstly not audible at all, it becomes louder and starts with its high-positioned motif in bar 13 when the band changes back to E major again. E major, by the way, is the field where this bass develops its quality: During A major and B major it is hardly to track and plays not much more than tonic notes. Throughout all bars with E major, this bass shows its fast played, high-sounding pattern, only pausing for the lead-guitar chorus (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Now I've got a witness: Bass 1: Motif



The first two quarter notes are played detached to give emphasis to each individual bar. The sound has very few overtones, but, due to this high position, it gives an enriching timbre to the song.

The contribution of the harmonica consists of an endless solo that just pauses during the lead guitar chorus. Jagger's playing reveals some typical blues elements and shows clearly his influences and his mastering of the instrument. As his playing is improvised, all chorusses differ, but all contain several aspects

of his style that are common. As an example the first chorus of the harmonica solo (starting in the fourth bar) is transcribed here (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Now I've got a witness: Harmonica Solo, First Chorus



Throughout, the harmonica uses the following notes: e, f sharp, g, a, b, c sharp, d; thus there are typical blue notes g and d here in this context and of these, g is played often. Apart from the very short grace-notes f sharp and c sharp, a typical pentatonic minor scale is used here, i.e.: e g a b d. Though the diminished fifth (b flat) is missing here, which would make the scale more bluesy still and as the pentatonic minor scale is used for solo work in blues and rock as well, Jagger can be identified here as a typical blues harmonica player, using important elements of that style.

The electric guitar appears in this song as a lead guitar only. It has the fourth chorus for its own, as the harmonica and the first bass are pausing here. Different from the harmonica solo, which goes on for the whole song in one level and still more different from the organ solo which is softer than the harmonica part, with which it shares the second chorus, the lead guitar chorus is the loudest of the song and so the lead guitar stands out from the rest of the song dynamically. The transcription of the complete lead guitar solo can be seen in

figure 7, shown with its up-beat as bar one, thus the chorus is counted here up to bar 25.

The lead guitar emphasizes on only a few notes, much of it on e1, which is quickly repeated with tremolo-effect in bar 7. The complete range used in the solo here is: e, g, a, b flat, b, d, and this, including the diminished fifth (b flat), is a typical blues-scale, including all three blue notes g, b flat and d in this context.

Figure 7: Now I've got a witness: Lead Guitar Solo, Fourth Chorus

The musical score for the Lead Guitar Solo, Fourth Chorus, is presented in ten staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C). The score begins with a whole rest in measure 1, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes in measures 2 through 22. The notes used are primarily from the blues scale: e, g, a, b flat, b, and d. A 'b' symbol indicates a flat for the note B in measures 4, 9, and 22. The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes, and rests. The score ends with a double bar line after measure 22.

Same as in the harmonica solo, the note g appears often. Although b flat and b are short grace-notes, they are repeated often and in their typical combination, i.e. slide upwards from b flat to b. The minor seventh (d) acts as an aiming point of that short motif. These notes are played in the grace-notes from bar 15 to 20 of the chorus and so they are used on the E major, B major and A major chord of the accompanying instruments.

The use of this blues-scale and its application over all chords show a blues and R & B-influenced playing style typical for Richards. Some interesting aspects should be mentioned. For example the up-beat at the beginning and the playing around the tonic note, also the use of the dominant while the accompaniment is playing the subdominant (here: slide from the grace-note a1 to b1 with long b on the A major chord). In this stage, Richards is still at the beginning of his musical career and thus clearly influenced by his guitar idols like Robert Johnson and Chuck Berry and their blues and R & B playing.⁵

Apart from that, some elements are typically „Richards“ which he went on using long after that first album: For example, he often plays motifs like the one in bar 11: Two quarter notes – often with bend ups - and then quickly falling down a fifth (from b1 to e1) by means of two sixteenth notes (a1 and g1) and one eighth note (e1), see figure 7, bar 11. Moreover, Richards makes use of his famous double-stops,⁶ which give a climax to the solo by including the highest notes b1 and e2, followed by three quarter note rests to let the impression work more intensely.

Regarding the song, the Stones took the original R & B-song (the Marvin Gaye Song), covered it to their „Can I get a witness“, and made their own R & B-song out of it „Now I’ve got a witness...“ by blending usual R & B-material with their distinctive and individual playing.

What is more, the song shows Jagger’s ability of blues harmonica and Richards’ lead work, mixed with his influences and own motifs. The two bass parts with one bass (here the second) as accompanying bass are another really individual aspect.

The second „half-own“ composition on the album, „Little by little“, has, as described, an unclear authorship: As Phil Spector is mentioned as co-author here, he might have contributed something to the song, but if he only gave the idea of including the maracas, which, as the album sleeve indicates, he played on the title or if there were further contributions for arrangement, lyrics or chord or form structure, is not known.

„Little by little“ has, compared to the „witness“-titles, a reduced tempo but is still fast with 170 bpm. Gene Pitney played piano,⁷ but it is recorded very soft compared to the other instruments in the mix. The other instruments are electric rhythm and lead guitar, bass guitar, drums, vocals, harmonica and maracas. With a running time of 2:39 it is still a rather short song even in the early sixties.

The song starts with a six bar intro before it goes over to the blues scheme, which is doubled here same as in the „witness“- songs and thus amounts to 24 bars and it is repeated five times. The chord structure of the song is:

Intro: E D / H7 G / E / E / E / H7/

Chorus: (Due to the variations with the seventh on the E major chord, all 24 bars are illustrated here.)

E / E / E / E/ E / E / E / E / A / A / A / A / E / E / E / E7 / H7 / H7 / A / A / E / E / E / H7

1: Verse 1

2: Lead Guitar

3: Harmonica Solo

4: Verse 2

5: Lead Guitar & Harmonica, Fade out

The intro consists of harmonica, rhythm guitar, bass and drums. The transcription of the first three instruments is shown in figure 8.

Figure 8: Little by little: Intro

The figure displays a musical score for the introduction of the song 'Little by little'. It consists of two systems of three staves each, representing Harmonica, Rhythm Guitar, and Bass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first system covers measures 1 through 5, and the second system covers measures 6 through 10. The Harmonica part is written in the treble clef, the Rhythm Guitar in the treble clef with a guitar-specific notation (including a '1' and '8' in a circle), and the Bass in the bass clef. The score shows the initial chords and melodic lines for these instruments.

The drums start in bar 3, adding bass drum on beats 1 and 3 and snare on beats 2 and 4. The opening chords from the first bar till the second beat of the third give a kind of cadence, they do not use the normal progression of tonic, subdominant and dominant chords to manifest the tonic E major here, but they use a more blues and rock oriented variation: E major, D major, B major seven with the seventh in the bass, G major and back to E major, so there are complete chords on the blue notes D and G. Can the D major chord be described as being the double subdominant in the E major key, G major goes still a bit further by being the subdominant to D major itself.

As the guitar plays the notes that are usual for the first position with open strings, there are not the common octave and fifth parallels that occur when barré chords are used. As the bass plays a falling line from e to E, the harmonica follows him in parallel motion for the first three notes and moves up in contrary motion to its initial e1 again.

From the second beat of the third bar till the first of the fifth bar there is a parallel motion between rhythm guitar and bass in octave intervall, using notes of the pentatonic minor scale e, g, a, b and d; this line is concluded with an octave jump upwards. The harmonica again acts in contrary motion and does not duplicate the upward jump. Not before the second half of bar five there is a parallel motion between harmonica and bass, leading to the dominant chord. The A note in bass and harmonica gives a dissonance to the E major chord of the guitar, but in context, the upward motion leads to the dominant chord and makes it still more consequent. Bar six is filled with this dominant B7, where the rhythm guitar adds double-stops consisting of fifth and seventh and the bass uses a chromatic line to stress the fifth of the chord.

The vocals⁸ consist of two verses with nearly identical notes (minor deviations caused by different lyrics). The first verse can be seen in figure 9.

The vocals can be divided into two parts by counting bar 1 to 8 (first half) as verse and bar 8 (second half) to 24 as refrain, where the lyrics are repeated in chorus 1 and 4.

The range is from d to e1 and includes the notes d, e, g, a, b, d1 and e1; that is, the blue notes minor third (g) and minor seventh (d1) appear here. The verse part persists mainly on the seventh (d1), sung over the E major chord, which gives the song a nervous, angry quality that fits well to the message of the lyrics. The vocals are falling down to the fifth (b) shortly on the next to the last word of a phrase. The end of the verse part shows a line downwards from d1 to e with longer staying on the blue note g. As the verse part covers the bars 1 to 8, it is accompanied by the chord E major only and thus the refrain part starts with A major, pauses during the guitar interlude in E major (bar 13 second half – bar 16 first half) and finishes over the dominant chord and last bars of the tonic.

Figure 9: Little by little: Vocals, 1st Verse / Refrain (First Chorus)



During the refrain part in A major, the vocals stress the notes belonging to the chord (a, e and e1), but resting long on the blue notes g and d. The handling of notes is similar at the end of the chorus during the dominant part, where the b and e is sung as parts of the dominant chord B major, but the blue notes d and g are used as well. The refrain part does not need to go to the end of the chorus, it is finished in the first half of bar 21.

The bass guitar plays a speedy walking bass throughout; the first chorus is transcribed in figure 10.

The other chorusses differ in minor variations only. The traditional walking bass from jazz, R & B and rock 'n' roll features mainly quarter notes; a few additional eighth notes tend to speed up the line. That is also the case here, but Wyman uses comparably many eighth notes, often when high points in the melodic line are aimed at, for example in bars 2, 14 and 22. The bass guitar takes over another typical traditional element of the walking bass figure: Each chord change is accentuated with the fundamental keynote, here e, a, and b in bars 1, 9, 13, 17, 19 and 21. In such a way the bass helps to emphasize the chordal structure of the blues scheme. The range is A – g1 and so it misses the deeper possibilities of the E-string, but there are, on the other hand, high positions up to g1.

Figure 10: Little by little: Bass, Chorus 1



The material consists of a long row of notes: A, B, c, d, d sharp, e, f sharp, g, g sharp, a, b flat, b, c1, c sharp1, d1, e1, f sharp1 and g1. Here is included the complete E major scale with the additional blue notes minor third, diminished fifth and the seventh, here expressed as g, b flat and d, where b flat appears only once shortly near the end in bar 24 as a passing note. The notes d and g are used often, d in both octaves d and d1, whereas g is the normal case for the minor third and g1 is played only once also in bar 7. The major third of E major (g sharp) is played only two times during the E major parts in bars 6 and 8 and as a seventh in the B major part in bar 18. The sixth degree of the E major scale (c sharp) is used more often to add the quality of this interval to the more simple chords of the guitar, but, although these are played on quarter notes some times, they reach not much more than the status of passing notes due to the high tempo of the song. During the A major parts, the c sharp stresses the major quality shortly (bars 10 and 20), but as the minor third of the A-scale is used here also as a blue note (c), the impression becomes blended same as in the E major parts. The note c appears once in the E major part (bar 16), where it has no specific harmonic function but acts as a passing note only.

As the bass guitar offers interesting elements, it is even the more regrettable that its level is so low in the mix and its sound with very few harmonics is hardly audible. Moreover, it seemed to be recorded from a greater distance, for there is a kind of reverberation on the bass sound.

The harmonica gets its solo on the third chorus, and Jagger introduces it with the exclamation „My turn!“, which he shouts out at the end of the guitar chorus. The complete solo is shown in figure 11.

Figure 11: Little by little: Harmonica Solo, Chorus 3



The solo starts with an up-beat shown in bar 1, so the chorus is counted here up to bar 25. The solo can be divided rhythmically in two structures: First there are the two parts that consist mainly of the trills with sixteenth notes, then there are two parts with longer notes, i.e. whole notes, half notes, quarter notes and a few eighth notes. The first E major section (bar 1 to 9) starts with the up-beat on a1, swings up to d2 and begins to trill with alternating d2 and b1 (bars 1 and 2). In this case, the d note is the louder and dominant one, which emphasizes the blues character as being a blue note in this context. This is the only material for the first seven bars. The first trill goes on nearly for four bars until Jagger pauses to

breathe and starts again with the up-beat (bar 5), to go on trilling for two more bars. In bar 9 a falling line marks the end of the first E major section. This line consists of a complete pentatonic minor scale (e, d, b, a, g), which then rises to the blue note g (bars 8 – 9).

Again with an up-beat, the first A major section is introduced, here with b (last quarter note of bar 9). The A section is mainly filled with long notes, the most dominant tone is e1 and being the fifth of the A major chord. In three times of four, this fifth is preceded by the blue note d1, which acts also here as the fourth within the scale of A major. Bar 15 produces the climax of the solo with a high positioned falling line, which also is nothing else than a pentatonic minor scale (d, b, a, g, e). The two bars of the dominant section B major (bars 18 and 19) are filled with trills again, this time the trill intervalls change every time at the beginning and in the middle of a bar, so it starts with d sharp and b, then c sharp and a in bar 18; then goes on falling to b and g sharp and to a and f sharp in bar 19. With this material, the trills use only elements of the E major scale, (with the exception of the missing fundamental e), changing their function in the B7 chord to key-note, major third, fifth, seventh and even to ninth (a).

This trilling of the B section is expanded to the second A part, where the intervalls change more quickly: the first half of bar 20 is filled with f sharp and d sharp, then a change to e and c sharp on the third beat and to d and b on the fourth. This last structure is continued in the next bar (21) till the third beat.

The last bars of the ending section of E major (bars 22 – 25) are filled with long legato lines of deep e notes, with a d note as a changing note. The last chord B7 is introduced with an up-beat in the next to the last bar, it stresses the key-note with a long whole note.

In this song, the guitar has three functions: Aside the usual filling with chords during the vocals and special lead breaks in chorus 2 and 5, here there are interludes that fill out spaces left by the vocals. The typical rhythm pattern is shown in figure 12.

Figure 12: Little by little: Rhythm Pattern, E major



The first bar of the repeated pattern is filled with the E major chord only, made of quarter notes and two eighth notes on the third beat. In the second bar the guitar plays two quarters with the E major chord and changes then to eighth notes with double-stops. These consist of c sharp1 and e1 (first and third eighth notes) and b and e1 (second and fourth eighth notes), so c sharp acts as a sixth here and in combination with the following eighth it functions as a retardation to the b note. This is the material for the first E major section (bars 1 to 8). The A

The other E major sections of the chorusses 1 & 4, that is, the vocal chorusses, are filled with the guitar interludes when the vocals rest. There is also an interlude at the end of the harmonica solo (chorus 3), where interlude 2 is played. During chorus 1, interlude 1 is played in the bars 13 – 16 of the chorus and interlude 2 in the bars 21 – 24. These interludes are shown in figures 13 (interlude 1) and 14 (interlude 2).

The ending is the only difference between interlude 1 and 2 in the first chorus, interlude 1 aims at the chord E major7 and therefore accentuates the intervall of a second (with the notes d and e) and the note d functioning as the seventh here, where interlude 2 comes to end at the B major 7 chord and introduces it with the rising line a, b flat and b (see bars 3 and 4 of both interludes). The first two bars of these interludes are made of material of the E major scale (e, f sharp, g sharp, c sharp and a), therefore there is no blues element to be found here. The only blue note is played in the mentioned ending of interlude 2, where b flat acts as a passing note.

14

Figure 15: Little by little: Lead Guitar, Chorus 2



This solo can be divided into seven parts:

- 1) Opening part
- 2) Hammering part
- 3) Bending section
- 4) Double-stop part
- 5) Bending & double-stop part
- 6) Closing part
- 7) Closing chord

The solo has a range from e – a2 and thus a limited bass range (not regarding the last chord that goes down to B), but it goes up high to a2; its medium, however,

is a playing around the note e1. The material is: e, g, a, b, d1, e1, g1, a1, bflat 1, b1, c sharp2, d2, e2, f sharp 2, g2, g sharp2, a2. This looks like a mixture of the E major scale and pentatonic minor scale plus blue notes. But Richards does not apply the whole scale permanently, there are distinctive changes within the different parts of the solo.

Part one with its rising and falling lines, interrupted by a quarter note rest, uses the pentatonic minor scale only (e, g, a, b, d) to lay ground for a blueslike character of the solo with its g and d blue notes, see bars 1 and 2.

Part two continues to use this material, here now with different articulation: From the short grace-notes (a) there are hammering-ons up to b, followed by the note d, which is regularly plucked. So this part consists of these three notes only (bars 3 and 4). This playing style is surely influenced by Chuck Berry.

Part three changes the articulation again and goes over to bendings. (Here shown with a „b“ over the two notes, indicating that the first note is quickly bent up to the pitch of the second, creating a kind of special effect that is very popular with electric guitar playing in rock music in general.) Here, these bendings use the note a1 as a starting point and bend the string so that the note b1 will sound. As the movement is quick, the note a1 can only be heard shortly. The repeated use of this articulation appears in bars 5 - 7, where the first note is an eighth note, so the bending is longer (or slower), and in bars 9 and 11 with very short a1 notes. As the hammering, this kind of bending with insisting on one note only (here: b), is another indicator for Chuck Berry's influence. In this part, the typical Richards motif (a quickly falling line down a fifth with the two sixteenth notes, as observed in „Now I've got a witness...“), does appear here also for two times, see bars 6 and 12. Concerning scales, no new material is used here, the pentatonic minor is dominating. As this is the part where the blues scheme has its A major section (bars 9 – 12), the insisting on the high b functions as a ninth, to add harmonic colour to the chord.

The fourth part introduces the double-stops to the chorus, leading to the climax of the solo with the highest note a2, which is reached by a short bend upwards from g sharp2. The double-stops with the notes b1 and e2, thus producing the fifth for the E major chord, start at the end of bar 12, therefore they act like an up-beat, as the E major part of the scheme begins in bar 13.

The fifth part of the solo is a mixture of double-stops, bendings and, at its end, of a few regularly plucked notes. It covers three bars of the second E major part, the complete dominant B major part and the second A major part (bars 14 – 19). Here we have another mixture of articulation and playing styles: The double-stop is a bended one, where the high note c sharp is bended up to d and then released again down to c sharp; in the same way the lower note a is bent up to b and released to a again. This is the only time where the note c sharp appears. The different bending action or range is due to the different gauge and handling of the strings: During a bend of two strings (as here with the double-stop), the lower string usually bends more when played in the same fret (here played probably in the high position of the 12th fret) and thus the lower note is

raised a whole note, whereas the higher one is raised for a half step only. The other material is the same as in the rest of the solo, that is, E pentatonic minor.

The sixth part of this solo surprises with an unusual ending (bars 21 – 23): Here, for the first time in this solo, the material changes to the E major scale, or at least, to important elements of this scale. With comparably big jumps up and down, the guitar forms a memorable and distinctive closing line. The high note g sharp² is followed chromatically by g², to jump down to the only existing blue note b flat¹ in the solo, followed also chromatically by a¹, just to jump up again to f sharp², which blends over to the lead out note e². As all other steps in this solo are rather small, these jumps make this ending all the more outstanding.

The seventh part does not really belong to the solo when lead guitar playing is considered, but as it fills the last two bars of the chorus, it should be mentioned. The guitar changes to chord playing here, giving a complete B major chord with three different b notes and doubled fifth. To make it rhythmically more urgent, the chord starts on the last eighth of the next to the last bar, then sounding on for the last bar, see bars 23 – 24.

The last, fifth chorus of the song does not last much more than 15 seconds due to the quick fade out that already starts in the seventh bar of this chorus, which features a second guitar & harmonica solo, where both play in combination. In the few first bars that are well to hear no new or outstanding material is presented, so this chorus can be left aside here.

Same as „Now I’ve got a witness...“, „Little by little“ demonstrates the handling of R & B-material with individual playing. The harmonica and lead guitar solos show the influences as well as some own motifs, like in Richards guitar playing. These motifs, which he might liked best, occur in several songs in his lead guitar playing and thus they are transferred to be one of his characteristics, though they surely go back to Chuck Berry’s influence as well. The bass guitar offers a sure way how to deal with walking bass lines, but as the walking bass is not at all typical for a song of the Rolling Stones, or, more precisely, for a song composed by the band, the bass guitar clearly shows its blues, R & B and Rock ‘n’ Roll influences here on one hand. But as the bass goes beyond the usual walking bass figures on the other hand by including, for example, high eighth note lines, it adds individual elements. The vocals rely completely on pentatonic material, and therefore they use a scale which is typical not only for earlier styles as R & B but also for many rock music styles to follow, a fact which Jagger might not have foreseen in the early sixties.

The song „Tell me“, which is clearly credited to Jagger and Richards, does not use the blues scheme and therefore there is a different approach to the music: As Hector puts it, Jagger was aware that home-grown R & B was pointless and so they opted for pure pop balladry – gentle and sentimental.⁹

The song sounds in B major, in this key the acoustic guitar is strange to play and as this guitar sounds as if open strings were used, the tuning in E flat (tuned down one half step) makes the playing normal again, it is to be assumed that at least the guitars were tuned down. Thus the song is transcribed the way it is played, that is, in C major, to show more clearly what the band is doing.

The instrumentation is: Acoustic guitar, electric guitar, bass guitar, drums, vocals, backing vocals, and tambourine.

The tempo varies from 112 up to 126 bpm. The intro starts slowly with 112, the verses speed up a bit and the refrains intensify the tempo further. The A-parts of the verses fall back again in tempo after a preceding refrain, but each new refrain will be slightly faster until the band reaches 126 bpm in the last fading out refrain. As there were no click tracks in the early sixties, there are two reasons for this change of tempo: The band did not realize or care about it or, more convincing, the B-parts of the verses and the refrains were supposed to speed up by purpose to suit the more dynamic playing style of these parts of the song and also of the more urging message of the lyrics directed to the lover to „come back“.

The song does not follow a blues scheme, but shows a song form with three parts A, B, and C, where A and B constitute the verses and C is the part of the refrain:

Intro

Verse 1

Refrain

Verse 2

Refrain

Solo = Verse scheme

Refrain

Verse 4

Refrain & fade out

So, leaving out the intro, the sequence of verses and refrains is repeated and the guitar solo follows the verse scheme with A and B part and there is no bridge, the pattern A – B – C is repeated four times.

The chord structure of the song will be demonstrated by the acoustic guitar, as this instrument is present during the whole song.

The intro consists of four bars instrumental playing with only acoustic guitar, bass and drums (see figure 16).

Figure 16: Tell me: Intro

The musical score for the intro of 'Tell me' consists of four bars. The Acoustic Guitar part starts with a C major chord (C-E-G) in the first bar, followed by a sequence of notes: F1 (first finger), D1 (first finger), and E1 (first finger) in the second bar, which is sustained for a half note. The Bass part has a whole note C in the second bar, introduced by a short grace-note A. The Drums part has a bass drum hit on the first beat of the second bar.

The pattern has only two bars, which are repeated. The acoustic guitar starts with a C major chord (written here as played, confer the remarks on tuning above), played with an arpeggio, followed by the changing notes f1 and d1 around the note e1. The last e note is sustained for a half note bound to a whole note. The bass guitar adds a whole note c in the second bar, introduced by the short grace-note A. As A is the open A-string of the bass, the note c can be reached by hammering on the third fret. This note of the bass guitar is supported by the drums, more accurately, by the bass drum only, which is struck here on the first beat of the second bar as well.

This short and economically scored intro prepares the following verse. The verses consist of two parts A and B, the A-part is the softer one. In the case of the first verse, the vocals of the A-part are only accompanied by the acoustic guitar. The scoring will then become more complex each time: The A-part of the second verse features also a bass guitar (very soft in the mix) and a tambourine that is struck really loud on each fourth beat of a bar. During the A-part of verse three, this tambourine goes on and the bass guitar (now louder) is supported by a loud bass drum, comparable to the combination of these two instruments in the intro.

The harmonical substance of all the A-parts of the verses is supplied by the acoustic guitar, see figure 17.

The A-part consists of eight bars with the chord pattern C G C G, each chord is played over two bars. The structure of the pattern played by the acoustic guitar during the chords C G is simply repeated here. Rhythmically, all bars start with a quarter note, followed by six eighth notes. To get a rich sound with lots of deep fundamentals, chords in the first position with open strings are used here, also the opportunity of playing all six strings is taken, so the range is from G – g1, where G is used as the bass tone in the C major chord as a fifth.

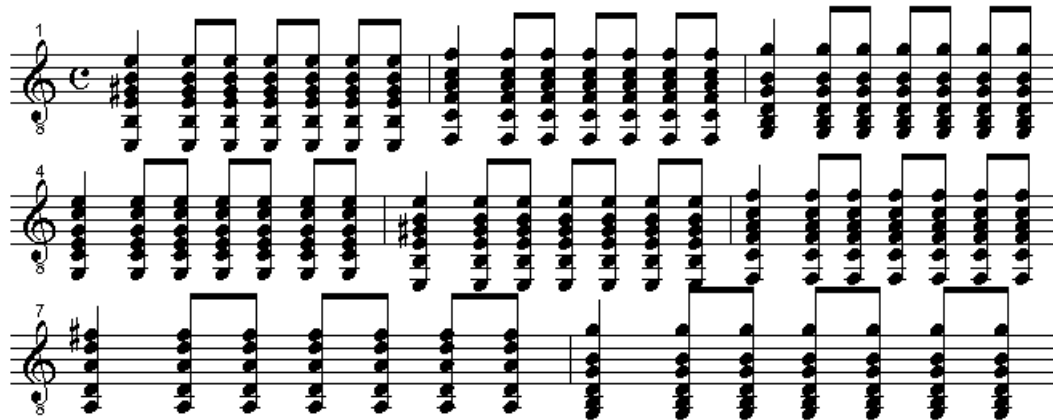
Figure 17: Tell me: Verse, A-part, Acoustic Guitar



There are a few suspensions here: In the C major part the last two eighth chords in the first bar use the note d instead of e, thus suspending the next note e, which appears again on the first beat of the second bar. In the G major part, the same technique is applied by suspending the third (here: B) by the second (here: A). This is used in the first G major bar on the third beat for one eighth and in the second G major bar three times on the complete second beat and on the first half of the third. These suspensions give more „colour“ to the simple chord changes.

During the B-parts of the verses, the acoustic guitar is still important as giving chord accompaniment to the song, now together with the electric guitar (see figure 18).

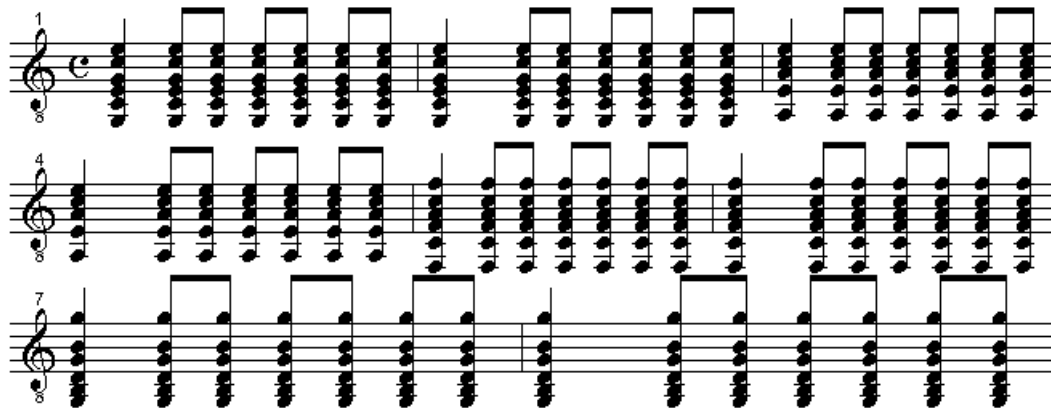
Figure 18: Tell me: Verse, B-part, Acoustic Guitar



The rhythmical structure has not changed, using quarter chords on the first beat and eighth chords for beat two, three and four. As the A-parts, the B-parts consist of eight bars as well, but here the chords change in each bar. The chord pattern is: E F G C E F D G, thus providing aside from the subdominant (F) and dominant (G) also the major dominant of the tonic parallel (E) and the double-dominant (D). The first two bars of the four bar pattern are equal (E F) and the third and fourth bars change. As the E major chord acts as a kind of surprise, as it is no chord belonging to the C major scale, the last G major as dominant chord leads directly to the refrain, which starts with the tonic C major.

The refrain is made of a simple turn-around figure with tonic, tonic parallel, subdominant and dominant, here: C major, A minor, F major and G major. The acoustic guitar plays these chords with the same rhythmic structure as in the verses: A quarter note chord is followed by eighth note chords on beats two, three and four. Each chord is played for two bars, so the refrain lasts eight bars as well, see figure 19.

Figure 19: Tell me: Refrain, Acoustic Guitar



The bass guitar has, compared to the fast walking bass lines in „Little by little“ or the high registered playing in „Now I’ve got a witness...“, a different function here. In „Tell me“, the bass has to add deep frequencies and simply support the keynotes of the chords; the slow ballad does not need fast played bass lines.

After the two notes in the intro, the bass is silent for the A-part of the first verse and has its next entry in the B-part of this verse, so this part is analysed first, see figure 20.

Figure 20: Tell me: Verse, B-part, Bass



With a few exceptions, the bass features the fundamentals only, that is, the keynotes of the chords E major, F major, C major and G major, so it follows a rising line from e to g here. During the F major bar, the bass uses a changing note e, for the C major chord, it jumps down to the keynote and adds an underlying fifth in this bar. The D major chord is supported by the third (here: f sharp), which acts as a leading note to the following g.

Rhythmically, the bass relies mostly on the simple repetition of one note with quarter note, eighth rest, eighth note and bound notes, so each note is not struck more than three times. In the last bar of this part (the second appearance of the chord G major), the bass imitates the rhythmic structure of the acoustic guitar by using a quarter note for the first beat and eighth notes for beats two, three and four.

During the following refrain where each chord is played for two bars, the bass guitar uses the rhythmic structure of the C major bar from the B-part of the verse, that is, quarter note, eighth note rest, eighth note and half note, see figure 21.

Figure 21: Tell me: Refrain, Bass



It even imitates the underlying fifth (g) here. During the A minor chord, the bass plays the third (c) and moves to the keynotes again with the F major and G major chords. In that way, the bass has a rising line from c to g in the refrain, which adds an increasing tension to this part of the song.

With the beginning of the second verse, the bass accompanies the A-parts of the verses as well, see figure 22.

Figure 22: Tell me: Verse, A-part, Bass



The simple and repeated change from the chords C major to G major is played with the rhythmical and harmonical structure known from the refrain for the C major bars and with a single whole note for the G major bars.

In the whole song, the bass plays these patterns in all verses (A- and B-parts) and in the refrains. There are only a few rhythmical variations during the lead guitar solo (that is equal to the verses with A- and B-parts), where there are no bound notes in the B-part so there is an extra quarter note struck on the fourth beat.

The electric guitar starts at the same time with the bass in the B-part of the first verse and continues into the refrain, but it pauses then for all the following A-parts. Except for a short glissando on a deep string that leads to the second E major in the B-part of the verses, the part of the electric rhythm guitar does not differ much from what the acoustic guitar is playing.

The electric guitar features a solo (see figure 23) between the second and third refrain, which has the same structure as the verses, so there are A- and B-parts here as well. Different from the two previous solos in „Now I’ve got a witness...” and „Little by little“, where wild improvising around pentatonic scales formed the motifs and patterns that are typical for Richards and where his influences came through, here in „Tell me“ there is a similar situation as there is for the bass guitar: Fast lines are not needed for this kind of ballad, the lead guitar as well plays a solo that is suitable for the song. In order to be as different from the otherwise influencing R & B and Rock ‘n’ Roll material as possible, Richards chose simple chord arpeggios for his solo.

Figure 23: Tell me: Lead Guitar Solo



By playing barré chords in high position, all notes, once struck, will fit harmonically. The notes are the results of the positions Richards has chosen, for C major, he took the 8th fret, for G major and for D major, the 10th fret. E major is played on the 12th and F major on the 13th fret. While using these positions, the notes nearly come automatically. His part was to decide when to move up or

down the strings – and therefore up or down the melodic line - and how long a note should last.

Most bars feature a rising and a falling line as well, once at its climax, the line falls down by big jumps like a twelfth as in bar one, or more gently as in bars three or seven. The used material is: For the C major chord: g, c1, e1, g1, c2; for the G major chord: g, d1, b1; for the E major chord: e1, g1, b1, e2; for the F major chord: f, c1, f1, a1; (the last two bars are rhythm like playing, so the range is augmented here down to d for both D major and G major). It comes clear that, for one exception, only the notes from the chords are played here (tonic, third, fifth, and often octaves of the tonic). The one exception is the E major chord, where the lead guitar uses the minor third (here: g) and therefore playing an arpeggio over the E minor chord, although the accompanying acoustic guitar plays E major, see bars nine and thirteen. This can be interpreted as the blue note g for the E major chord or, regarding the entire solo; the solo uses the complete material of the C major scale where the note g is the fifth.

Often the entry is not on the first beat of a bar, but on the second (once, see bar one) or on the second half of first beat, like in bars three, five or seven. In many cases the highest note in a bar is a longer one, often two eighth notes are bound to last one quarter, see for example bars three, six, seven, eight.

Starting with the tenth bar he uses double-stops that consist of tonic and third (for F major in bars ten and fourteen and for G major in bar eleven). C major in bar twelve is played with a fourth, consisting of the tonic c and underlying fifth g. During the second appearance of E major in bar thirteen, a third is used as a double-stop with the blue note g and with b.

The last two bars feature no arpeggios, but barré chord rhythm guitar playing; both chords are played on the 10th fret and therefore have the note d in the bass, once as a tonic (for D major), and as a fifth (for G major). In G major, the high e1-string is not used, for Richards prefers to play the d-, g- and b-string with his little finger that has to mute the high e1-string for this barré position otherwise it would produce a sixth, which is not wanted in most cases. For this reason, the D major chord is played with six strings, the G major chord with only five strings here.

The vocals¹⁰ start the A-part of the verse with a short up-beat, see figure 24.

(As the up-beat is shown as bar one, the A-parts amounts up to seventeen bars here.) The motifs used here are comparatively short (not more than three or four notes) and many longer rests lie between them. The first four-bar-pattern is repeated entirely. It is made of simple melodic lines with small steps not greater than a third. The material consists of only three notes c1, d1 and e1. The lines stop on the tonic in C major (c) or on the fifth in G major (d).

Figure 24: Tell me: Verse 1, Vocals



The first four bars of the B-part are not repeated, but differ not only because of the different ending, but also during the E major and F major chords. Whereas the A-part uses deep notes, the pitch is raised in the B-part. The E major chord is represented with its fifth and fourth, the F major chord with fifth and third. In the repetition of these chords (bars 14 – 15), there are rhythmical deviations due to the different handling of syllables. For the endings of each four-bar-pattern of the B-part, the vocals choose different notes: The first half over the C major chord (bar 13) sustains on g, i.e. on the fifth, the last chord G major at the end of the second part sustains on b (bar 17), that is, the third of the G major chord. The last three notes in bar seventeen belong to the up-beat of the refrain.

The entire material of the vocals shows a complete C major scale, depending on what chord is in the accompaniment, the emphasis is shifted to the tonic note (C major), fifth and third (G major), fifth (E major), fifth and third (F major) for the long sustaining notes. Notes not belonging to the chords are changing notes as the note a in E major (bar 10 and 14), or the note a in G major (bar 12). The note c in the D major chord acts as a passing note and as a leading note to the following b (see bars 16 – 17).

The refrain features backing vocals along with the lead vocals, the transcription of the refrain can be seen in figure 25.

The first bar shows the ending of the B-part of the verse and the up-beat to the refrain. The lead vocals sing a sequencing motif here that can be divided into two parts – opening and ending parts. With variations, all these parts appear four times. All parts feature a falling melodic line, which is only partly transposed upwards so there is a tonal variation here in the sequencing. The pitch of the starting note in the opening part is raised from g (during the C major chord) up to a (on the A minor chord), stays on this note during the F major chord and continues to climb to b on the G major chord.

Backing Vocals

Vocals

The musical score consists of three systems of staves. The first system has two staves: 'Backing Vocals' and 'Vocals'. The second system also has two staves, continuing the vocal parts. The third system has two staves, with the top staff starting at measure 8. The music is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). The key signature has one flat (B-flat), indicated by a blue flat symbol on the B line of the staff.

As guitar and bass, the vocals are simple in this song, especially when the verses are concerned; moreover, there is no use of blue notes or pentatonic scales. The vocals rely completely on the C major scale.

26

the bass in the A-part of the third verse and adds additional strucks, see figure 26.

Figure 26: Tell me: Verse 3, A-part, Bass Drum



As the A-parts of the verses are very soft, the loud bass drum gives an urgent element to this verse, even more, as it includes more and more eighth notes in the middle of the bars. This playing is already present during the lead guitar solo, but as this is a louder part of the song in general, the bass drum is not so striking as in the verse.

The drums contribute another important aspect to the song: Each B-part of the verses is introduced by loud strucks on the toms as an up-beat: Two strucks (the last eighth of a bar) to introduce the B-part of verse 1, and three strucks in the second verse (and also for the B-part of the lead guitar solo). These strucks are left out in the third verse.

The tambourine is also played with changing action during the song: Starting on the B-part of the first verse, it usually beats on beat two and four, in the A-part of the second verse, it changes and plays the fourth beat only. During the rest of the song, it goes on beating on two and four, even in the third verse.

As a summary, some points should be in mind: The intense use of pentatonic scales and blue notes is the usual case for rock and pop music as blues and R & B lay the grounds for many of the newer styles of rock music. In the early times of the Rolling Stones, however, beat and rock and pop were not invented yet, a musician who used this material clearly shows his roots. Therefore, the first two songs are in the R & B and Rock 'n' Roll tradition, although they show several aspects that demonstrate individual handling of the material.

The song „Tell me“ was arranged to be as far from this well known material as possible, its simple composition of vocal and bass lines and the arpeggio solo demonstrate that the band was still trying. On the other hand, a ballad is cleverly chosen here: This style does not need masterly action in solos or accompanying, the emphasis is on „feeling“. It is a known fact that the ballads of the Rolling Stones do not lack this element, later ballads as „As tears go by“, „Lady Jane“, Ruby Tuesday“, „Angie“ and many others clearly show that the band has found an important part of its repertoire and its compositional talent in this style. Not using the blues scheme must have been another challenge to the songwriters.

The band went on using R & B and blues influenced songs for the fast titles, until in 1965 they wrote „Satisfaction“ and finally found a composition method for their fast songs: The riff oriented rock song, of which Keith Richards became a master. From then on, the R & B influenced material becomes more rare.

Notes:

¹ cf. Richards, Keith. in: St. Michael, Mick (Ed.) Keith Richards. In His Own Words. London, 1994. p. 24

² cf. Hector, James. The Complete Guide to the Music of The Rolling Stones. London, 1995. p. 21.

³ cf. Ewing, Jon. The Rolling Stones. Quote Unquote. Bristol, 1996. p. 21.

⁴ The Fender IV Bass is a short-scale Bass Guitar with six strings; with its (for a bass) rather short scale it looked almost like a normal electric guitar. It was built only from 1961- 63. See Bacon, Tony; Moorhouse, Barry. The Bass Book. London, 1995. p. 88.

⁵ cf. Vogel, Joachim. Masters of Rhythm Guitar. Brühl, 1992. p. 16.

⁶ These double-stops are surely due to the influence of Chuck Berry. Cf. Gill, Chris. Guitar Legends. The Definitive Guide to the World's Greatest Guitar Players. London, 1995. p.109.

⁷ cf. Hector, p. 21-22.

⁸ The lyrics are not transcribed here, for the article has its emphasis on tonal structure.

⁹ cf. Hector, p. 23.

¹⁰ Transcribed is the first verse with its refrain. The other vocals of the rest of the song do not differ from the first verse. Minor rhythmical variations are due to the different handling of syllables.

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Sound Carriers:

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